

How to Grow

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[0 : 00] We're in Philippians chapter 2, we're going to look at verses 12 through 16. Let me read the passage and then we'll do a little intro here.

Paul ends verse 11 with the idea that every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. And then he starts verse 12 with, Therefore, my beloved, as you've always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that you did not run in vain or labor in vain.

That is the word of the Lord. Let me ask you this. How many of you are planning to make some sort of garden or some, you know, small little plantings or something this year?

Just a couple of you? All right. How many of you have done it in the past and you swear you'll never do it again? Okay. Yeah. Yeah, no, that's fair. That's fair. How can you tell, those of you who have done this or planted this, how can you tell that a plant is healthy?

[1 : 46] How do you tell that a plant is healthy? It's green. It grows. It grows? It's green. It grows. It stands up straight. Okay, right. All the things that you would expect to see of it as doing it.

When it's unhealthy, you see what kinds of things? You see. Drooping. Drooping. Not thriving. Not thriving. Yellowing. Yellowing.

Right? There's different things that can cause those. Shriveling. So, what would be a healthy Christian? Vibrant.

Growing. Growing. You know, here's the thing. I think that for so long as pastors, we want so much to see people come to know the Lord and become Christians.

And we've preached the gospel in such a way as to make the gospel seem like a door into a whole new world. And once we get past that door, we tend to not really have a lot to say to people who've come through the door.

[2 : 54] It's like all we want to do is just get people through the door. Just open the gate and get as many cattle in as we can. Or sheep. Right? And then just close the door. But now we've got to be in.

Okay. We're good. And we've just sort of left it there. But the problem is, is that we've not accentuated and helped people understand how do you grow? Because we should grow.

And let me just say that the gospel is not a door. And then you leave it behind you. The gospel is the path, the door, the pen, the food, and the environment that we go into.

It's everything. I'll use my favorite phrase. It's the warp and woof of everything. Right? The gospel is everything. So, with that, Paul is talking to them about growing.

And that's what our passage is about today. If we see someone not growing in their faith, and it's been a long period of time that they're not growing in their faith, then that's a person who's in danger of being a false convert.

[4 : 00] John, the apostle, wrote the letter, 1 John, and in it he writes, They went out from us, but they were not really of us. For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out so that it would be shown that they were not one of us.

In other words, there's a lot of people, as Jesus says, who will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name? And he'll say to them, depart from me, for I never knew you.

It's a very hard, hard word. It is very possible to look like a Christian, to act like a Christian, to even taste of the powers of the age to come, and not be a Christian.

That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5, Test yourselves to see if you're in the faith. And for you, I think it's good for you to be testing yourself to see if you're in the faith, but it is very bright and good for us to be looking at our loved ones.

Because here's the thing, if you believe that because they came through the door, they're saved, but they've never lived out, and they're not growing, to continue to treat them as though they are a Christian when they're not a Christian, brings no hope.

[5 : 23] We're supposed to be sharing the gospel. So you want to be sharing the gospel with them as much as possible. But so how do we grow then? How does that growth happen? What's involved so that we can be healthy Christians and we can grow?

Two things. First, we're going to look at a general principle about this. There's two principles that verse 12 and 13 give us. And so let's take a look at that.

Verse 12 and 13. So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So what seems to be to you the primary command in verse 12? Work out your salvation. Just what I was around.

Continue to work. Yeah. Just this working out. Exactly. Work out. This term is a mathematical term. It's the idea of sit down and calculate this out, plan this out.

[6 : 33] It's the idea of effort being put into place. It's a process. It's a testing. It's an achievement of goals. So that's the primary command. Work out your salvation.

Now, what is the primary emotion or state of mind that Paul wants the Philippians to have while they work out their salvation? Fear.

Fear. Fear. Okay. With fear and trembling. Who do you think Paul wants you to fear? God. God. God. Oftentimes we don't really want to talk about fearing God, do we? Is it right for a Christian to fear God? Yes. Yeah.

As a matter of fact, I believe Proverbs 1.7, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and fools despise wisdom and instruction. This fear, it's not going to be necessarily a sense of dread of the Lord, but it is that healthy understanding that he is other than us.

[7 : 41] It's that healthy understanding like fire, right? You light a fire and you treat it a certain way because you know that it can do damage. Well, imagine then turn that into a person, turn that into a father and a son.

The son fears his father in such a way, in a healthy way, right? So it's this respect and this love, but he talks about trembling as well. And this trembling is a shaking.

I can almost see, I can almost see this trembling with this fear, trembling, this working out your salvation. I can see someone like with straps on their shoulders with a rope attached to something heavy behind them, dragging it.

And the more the effort that they put into it, the more sweat they begin to pour, the more shaking as they're trying to do this. So the attitude of this working out your salvation is an attitude of a strenuous, reverent, respectful fear and trembling, right?

So that's the idea. Does that make sense? I mean, this is like there's nothing else in the world that requires this much effort. This requires the most effort of everything.

[8 : 51] That's really kind of Paul's thought. So that's then the first principle is the first principle of maturing as a believer is effort. It takes effort on our part.

There is no such thing as let go and let God, right? Y'all remember that way back in the day? A lot of people used to say let go and let God. And I understand why they said that.

And there's a half truth there. But it's not the entire truth. We're supposed to put forth effort. We cannot just sit back and hope that we become holy.

Now think about this. If we're going to grow, that means we have to become like Christ. Becoming like Christ means holy. So being holy or righteous is a result of obeying the commandments of God. So the effort we are to put forward is the effort to obey what God has commanded. Now, go to Sunday morning. You'll remember I've said that we don't obey the commandments to earn salvation.

[9 : 55] We have salvation. We have salvation. So we're supposed to obey. My dad in the hospital didn't look at my little fat baby self and say, okay, go mow the yard.

And then if you mow the yard every day, then you can be my son. No, no, no. It was you're my son. So go mow the yard, right? The relationships first. The obedience second.

That's exactly what's going on here. We'll get to that in just a second. But the point is this, we are supposed to put forth effort and that effort is in fighting against our sin by being obedient to the commandments.

I have a footnote here. It says, Paul does not say work for your salvation. God has already worked to make salvation possible.

The Christian's role is to work out what God has worked in by cultivating the characteristics of a godly life. That's my third point in just a second. Exactly right. No, let's just talk about it.

[10:54] It is actually work out. Work out the salvation. It's already there. Now you can think of it in an exercise way. I already have the muscle.

So I'm working it out to make it stronger, make it grow. You don't work out in order to all of a sudden make muscle appear. It's already there. Right? Right? So you're just working out your salvation.

Or another thing to think about is going back to the mathematic problem. It's there. You just have to figure it out. You've got to understand it. Right? So right. It is not your salvation.

And it's not going to happen by accident. You can't just sort of willy-nilly hope that this thing takes place. So what do we have to do if we're going to grow in our faith?

I'm going to give you a big word here or a big phrase. Means of grace. I like to use this phrase because it really communicates a lot for me. If you were to drive here today, which I'm assuming most of you did since you don't live across the street like I do.

[11:59] You drove here today. You got here by God's grace. Right? You all believe that. Because even though your hands are on the wheel, even though your eyes are watching the road, even though it's your reflexes, you understand that you're a person who's created by God.

He's given you your abilities and by his providence he kept any kind of accident from happening to keep you from coming. You got here today by God's grace. We understand God's grace in providence that way.

You understand in the mornings. Right? You get up and we all wake up and we all have our own little issues in the morning. Some of them it's like I do not wish to get up or I can't get up or moving is so slow.

But you still got here today. How? By God's grace. And you know that. You feel that. Right? We know that God gives us grace. Here's the thing.

God gives us grace in other ways besides just his providence. And one of those ways has to do with things that he's commanded us to do through which he brings grace into our lives to sanctify us.

[13:09] To make us holy. To help us grow. One of those means is through prayer. Prayer. So here's the problem.

Our modern world. We're a little douchey-gushy from my field. Right? I don't like the douchey-gushy of our modern world. Where we start talking about prayer as a conversation with God.

And that conversation means that we need to listen more than we talk. And I think that's a really wrong perception of prayer. Prayer is our requesting of God.

Right? And there's a relationship there. But God speaks through his word. We speak through prayer. Prayer. That's the relationship. Right? But prayer, as we go to him and we pray, we end up working out all kinds of things as we think about the scriptures.

As we call on him and ask him to help us. He gives us the grace we need. And here's what I mean. Say that you're...

[14:09] Well, you know, my son. My son was talking to me last night. And he was talking about some things going on at his church. And he asked the group that he meets with. He says, I want you all to pray for me that I would have humility and patience.

Because of what he's dealing with. Right? So what happens over time is that as you pray, Lord, give me humility. Give me patience. You know, a lot of them say, well, don't pray for patience because God will give you suffering.

And I say, absolutely. Pray for patience. We ought to pray for patience. It's a fruit of the spirit. Right? Right? God gives us grace. Little by little. Just like manna. Just enough for today.

So that I can be more humble today than yesterday. More patient today than yesterday. I won't be perfected. But we'll be in the right direction. See, it's always about direction, not perfection.

The means of grace that are these things that God uses in our lives. And I'll tell you what they are. They're praying. Reading the Bible. Attending the preaching of the word.

[15:14] Lord's Supper. Baptism. Baptism. Those are things he tells the church to do. I mean, when we do the Lord's Supper, we're receiving grace from the Lord.

The Lord's Supper, if done right, from the right kind of mindset, can bring to you as much conviction of your sin, as much encouragement about the cross, as any good sermon.

And that's what it's meant to do. It's meant to be a preaching of the gospel to yourself. To remind you of your sin. To remind you of the goodness of God. It's a good thing.

It's a good thing. The means of grace. So that's the first principle. We've got to put forth effort, and we need to put our effort into these things, such as reading the Bible, praying, and the like.

So let's look at verse 13, then. Go back to verse 13. It's, he says, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[16:22] He says to work out our salvation. And what do you think, what do you think, let me get rid of some of this, some of this, I can't get rid of this stuff. What do you think this word right here is doing?

Can you not see it? For? For. For. Work out your own salvation for.

What's another way of saying that? For what? Because. Because. Work out your salvation because. Here's what's going on behind the scenes.

Put forth effort because God. Now what is God doing? He's doing two things. He's working. He's working to produce two things. Right? Our will.

Our will. And his good pleasure. Right. He's working. God's working right here. Right? To will and to work for his good pleasure.

[17:23] Will has to do with our desire, our ability, our choices. Work has to do with the energy and the effort expended. Wow. Right there.

That's where the connection. Put forth effort. Because it's God who works in you. To put forth effort. Oh, that is good. That is good right there.

Right? Right? The second principle then is that to grow as a Christian we have to trust. So we have to put forth effort and we have to trust.

Here's how I see this. Right? I know that I need to read my Bible. And that's the means of grace.

And I want to grow. And I want to become like God. And so I open up my Bible in the mornings and I start reading it. But there's some days I do not want to read it.

[18:18] Right? There's some days I just wake up. I don't want to. Part of it is not because I don't want to know what's there. But part of it is because I just am tired. I'd rather sleep.

I'd rather do something else. My brain hurts. I'm tired of thinking. Because when I read the Bible I got to think. Right? The Bible is not a magic book. We talked about that. The Bible is not a magic book. I don't open it up and just all of a sudden, whoo, wispy things come out.

And they start, you know, twinkling in my eyes. And now I can cast spells. I mean it's not a magic book. Right? If I open it up, I've got to put effort in it. So my desire to want to do it.

If I'm able to overcome the sinful part of me that says don't do it. And I just go ahead and do it anyway. That was God.

Not you. So now I'm reading. And I read in there about how I need to love my wife as Christ loved the church.

[19:17] And I go, well that's really hard. Because I'm very selfish on one hand. On another hand, loving like Christ is way past what I feel like I can do.

How am I going to do that? I want to do that. But how am I going to do that? So I begin to look at all the things it says about what love is and how to do that. So as I begin to try to live that out, all of a sudden I am loving my wife the way Christ loved the church.

But all of a sudden I look around and I kind of go, but I don't feel like God's doing anything. Like you know what I'm saying? Like I don't feel a burning in my bosom. And all of a sudden I'm like, I love you now. Like Christ loves the church. You know?

It's not something that just all of a sudden takes over my mind. And all of a sudden I'm possessed by the Holy Spirit. And I'm loving my wife the way Christ loved the church. But really my mind is absent.

It's not that kind of thing at all. I don't feel anything. Now you might feel something. But I don't feel something. Because there's nothing in here that says you will feel this.

[20 : 20] You're going to feel God take over you. So here's my point. My point is this. Is that in all the ways that you obey Him, the desire and the work, that comes from Him.

And whether you feel it or not, we believe what He says. And so I would tell you this.

All the weakness that you feel in your life, the weakness about obeying His commandments for this, or this, or this. It's like, I'm just so weak.

I just don't do this very well. Don't believe. Don't believe the weakness. God's at work. Whether you feel it or not.

You put forth the effort. It's God who's putting forth that effort through you. But you're going to put forth the effort. Does that make sense whatsoever? Yes. Isn't it implicit?

[21 : 18] I think when you say work out your salvation, isn't it implicit in that that you, that part of that working out, or that maybe even the whole of working that out, is to submit and to facilitate and to foster and to certainly to will to undergo the process of sanctification.

Yes. That's the evidence of your salvation is a continued path through sanctification. And then, with fear and trembling, I don't know, if you were a lawyer and you were going, or you just graduated from law school and you went to sit for the bar, you would sit for that and prepare for it with fear and trembling.

And so, to me, that is a sense of both the import and the urgency of working out your salvation, of submitting and fostering in your own life the process of sanctification.

And that's where the will and the work go through, is that you are working hand-in-hand with God for your sanctification. Correct. So, when we talk about salvation, a lot of times, as Baptists, we love to talk about how we're saved by grace, through faith, and not of works, right?

That is, Jonah says, salvation belongs to the Lord. There's a term that is sometimes used that talks about how that's really just God working. But then there's another term that when we get to sanctification, that's used to talk about how it's God and us working.

[22 : 54] Right? So, I am saved, but by God alone, but I'm sanctified by God working through me. So, it's God and me. So, if I'm not putting forth the effort, if God is not working, then there's no sanctification.

Both of those have to be there for there to be sanctification. Absolutely. In my Bible, good pleasure is rewritten as His good purpose. So, His purpose is, like Gary said, for us to work toward our salvation.

So, the word that's there, I think good pleasure is probably a better translation just because of the word that's there.

but I think that His pleasure and His purpose are inseparable. If that makes sense. Right? I think that His pleasure is His purpose and His purpose is His pleasure. So, what Paul does, at least in my opinion, is from here, He gives that general feel, He gives that general feel, but then He goes to a specific example in verse 14.

And, just, just, this is, look out. That's all I have to say. Verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent children of God, above reproach, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ, you will have reason to glory, because I did not run in vain or toil in vain.

[24 : 36] Do all things, okay, I keep flipping through those, do all things without, two things, what are those two things? Grumbling and arguing. Okay.

Well. Disputing. So, this word grumbling, but first of all, let me ask you this.

The idea of all things, do all things, is there any part of life that that does not cover? Is there anything in the context, sometimes there are, is there anything in the context that would limit, what Paul is saying, about all things?

And I'm thinking chapter one, chapter two, chapter three. There's a couple of things I think, although I think, I think it's pretty broad.

They're concerned about Paul being in prison. Right? That's the reason he's writing the letter. He's writing to them, because there's been disunity in the church. So, there's relational difficulties.

[25 : 48] He's also writing to them, telling them how to live a content life. And he also writes to them in chapter three, about people who are trying to get them, to start looking like the Galatians.

Right? Some sort of works oriented salvation. And so, at least those things, but I think because of the relation difficulties and stuff, I really think this is a pretty broad, do all things.

Grumbling. Now that, that word, our word grumbling, it sounds like what it is, right? Grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble, right? It's onomatopoeic.

I think I got that right. Here's the interesting thing. The Greek word that's there is also onomatopoeic. Here's the Greek word. It is, gongizmos, gongizmos.

It's a low grumbling. It's this low, um, where is it? Where'd the word go? I lost it. Uh, a low toned utterance under the breath, under the breath, griping.

[26 : 59] This is complaining in the Greek is muttering or grumbling, an inner rebellion that defies God to his face and disputes his right to rule. Right. So then the disputing one is arguing about conflicting ideas with someone, engage, uh, in particular type of dialogue that always leads to doubt.

In other words, you know, um, there's some people that like to play devil's advocate all the time and they'll play devil's advocate and then just throw that out there and they do that. And it leaves, it leaves people sometimes with doubts and skepticism and they don't help the person go any further than that and find truth.

That's the kind of idea in first Timothy chapter two, Paul uses this same word for dissensions. Um, my, uh, my grandfather took my brother and I to Colorado back when we were kids and he wanted to, wanted to take us to the Will Rogers museum that's there in Colorado Springs.

And as my grandfather was getting us ready and everything wanting us to go, we were just standing there. And then we began to marshal out our arguments, but, but we're not going to be here for much longer.

We want to swim in the swimming pool, you know, and whatever arguments we had, that is classic example of what I think this grumbling and this arguing or complaining is.

[28 : 22] So look at verse 15. What, what purpose does verse 15 say? comes by avoiding the grumbling and disputing. You may become blameless and harmless, showing God without fault.

Okay. You will become, and this translation uses the word prove, but it is the idea of become or the idea of demonstrating, showing, right?

It shows that you are blameless and innocent, right? Children, uh, of God above reproach in a, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation or twisted generation among whom you appear as lights in the world.

In other words, if you're going to be a light, and if you've got a flashlight that's got a bunch of crud on the lens, then the light's not very bright. But the more you clean off that lens, the brighter the light will shine, right?

When we grumble and complain, we have a dirty lens through which the light of Christ shines. So we need to not have that so that we shine forth the light of Christ.

[29 : 32] So who are you demonstrating and, and proving yourself to be blameless and innocent too? Yes. Who, who are you demonstrating it? It's, it is the perverse and crooked generation that you're doing.

That's right. That's exactly right. Because that's why he talks about appearing as lights in the world. And then he goes on in verse 16, holding fast the word of life or holding forth, really holding forth the word of life.

So our evangelistic efforts, anytime that we seek to try to go share the gospel with someone, if they have ever seen us in a restaurant get frustrated at the waitress, then we are not good lights.

Michelle and I were at a church years ago, and we were, we had a gymnasium and we're going to do a potluck. And the potluck, we had this one little room off the gymnasium and they had all the tables set up in the gymnasium.

And then this little entryway, they had four or five tables, two tables a piece set up. We were having like Mexican pylon or something like that, you know, taco salad.

[30 : 42] And they had every five tables, all five of them set with the exact same food, right? So that we could get 10 lines through and get people seated.

Because we had about 300 people in that, in that service, right? And I remember going through there and here was this, here was this lady. She was standing in front of us, behind us. I can't remember. Just griping about the way this was set up, griping about the food, griping about all these things.

And it reminded me of, of this proverb right here, death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruit. We, we can speak life or speak death, not in some sort of magical

way, but this lady, she was just breathing death on everything.

And there's a person who says she's a believer, says that she loves the Lord, but she couldn't help but just complain about it all. And I know that there's a difference. There's, there's things where it's like, okay, the toilet gets clogged up.

Oh, the toilet clogged up. What? You know, but there's a difference when you flip over between recognizing something and trying to draw a solution and then complaining against God, because now in his providence, you've got to do something.

[31 : 55] And the point is, is this, the test case, if God, if you're to work after salvation with fear and trembling, for it's God who's at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure, then how you think about things, whether you grumble and complain, is a good test case, is a good test case and a good place for the Philippian church because of their disunity, they needed to understand you've got to stop complaining about each other.

You've got to stop whining about each other. You've got to stop griping about these things. You've got to stop breathing death about one another. And so that's his specific sort of example that I would say.

Let's see. I think Paul, in verse 16, did not want to have worked in vain over them. So that's why he's writing to them and helping them to understand that they need to live in a particular way.

All of our evangelistic efforts, all of our efforts to try to disciple others, they are affected by how we live out a holy life. All right.

So with that said, I have some questions here. I got about four questions for you and let you break up into a couple of groups and try to talk through some of these things, see how you can apply it.

[33 : 21] And then we'll close after.